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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000201

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DEPT FOR AF/S - ELIZABETH PELLETREAU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: MALAWI - VP CHILUMPHA TO CHALLENGE MULUZI FOR UDF
NOMINATION

REF: LILONGWE 56

Classified By: Acting DCM John Warner for Reason 1.4 d

11. (C) Summary: On March 27, Vice President Cassim Chilumpha officially announced his intention to run against former president and current United Democratic Front (UDF) chairman Bakili Muluzi for the party's presidential nomination. The UDF will choose its nominee at a convention on April 24, over one full year before May 19, 2009 presidential elections. Despite legal uncertainties about Muluzi's eligibility to stand for a third non-consecutive term, Muluzi's control of party finances and the perceived need of Muluzi's blessing to maintain grassroots UDF support had effectively stopped prospective challengers from declaring their ambitions. Chilumpha's announcement came just days after Muluzi claimed that President Mutharika had secretly made an offer to stop pursuing a corruption case against Muluzi in return for Muluzi dropping his presidential bid and throwing his support to Mutharika. Some speculate that Chilumpha, under house arrest since April 2005 for allegedly plotting to assassinate Mutharika, has struck a deal to have the charges dropped in return for challenging Muluzi. A prominent Muslim leader told emboff that after failing to make headway with Muluzi's Muslim support base, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is funding Chilumpha's bid for the UDF nomination, but Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM) leadership remain split on whom to support between Chilumpha and Muluzi. Regardless of support or motivation, Chilumpha offers UDF supporters a legitimate challenger, albeit one with his own legal uncertainties, with both the political experience and name recognition to challenge Muluzi and potentially Mutharika for the presidency. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On March 27, Vice President Cassim Chilumpha officially announced that he would run against the former president, Bakili Muluzi, for the UDF presidential candidate nomination. The announcement comes after months of grumbling by disgruntled senior UDF members, many of whom believe that Muluzi's bid is legally dubious and that it is time for new leadership in the party (ref A). Despite these misgivings and dissension among senior party members, only former UDF Publicity Secretary Sam Mpasu had been vocal in his criticism of the party's lack of internal democracy. Others remained quiet, calculating that both Muluzi's blessing and financial support would be required to capture the grassroots UDF support base needed to challenge Mutharika.

13. (U) The UDF will hold its convention to choose its nominee on April 24, a full year before the May 19, 2009 presidential elections. Muluzi's potential candidacy still faces legal uncertainty about whether he can stand for a non-consecutive third term as president, having already served the maximum stated constitutional limit of two consecutive terms. The early convention could give the party time to resolve the legal questions before nominations are due to the Malawi

Electoral Commission in early January.

¶4. (SBU) Chilumpha's announcement came days after Muluzi claimed that Mutharika had secretly offered to stop pursuing a corruption case against the former president in return for his agreement to drop his presidential ambitions and support Mutharika's re-election. Others suspect that Chilumpha, who is under house arrest himself in conjunction with an April 2006 arrest for treason and conspiracy to assassinate Mutharika, may have a deal with Mutharika to drop the charges in return for challenging Muluzi. Fueling suspicions, on March 30 the government announced that Chilumpha's trial would not start until May 26, the latest of several delays in the three-year saga.

¶5. (C) Chilumpha, like Muluzi, is a Muslim. While Muslims comprise only 13% of Malawi's population, the Muslim population is concentrated in the south, particularly in UDF strongholds that have supported Muluzi for the last decade. Despite Mutharika and the DPP's best efforts, the population remains largely supportive of the UDF and Muluzi himself. The national chairman of the Muslim Association of Malawi, Yusuf Kanyamula, told emboff that Mutharika's DPP is financially supporting Chilumpha's bid, using Minister of Irrigation and Water Development Siddiq Mia as an intermediary, in an effort to weaken support for Muluzi. Kanyamula said Mia has also promoted Chilumpha's bid with several important Muslim leaders, but he said that the leadership of MAM remained split between Chilumpha and Muluzi. (COMMENT: This may be why Muluzi organized a rally over the weekend in Mia's Ngabu constituency in Chikwawa district.)

¶6. (SBU) Chilumpha is a commercial lawyer by training and was a university professor before entering politics. He

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previously served as Minister of Defense and Minister of Finance under Muluzi. Once seen as one of Muluzi's closest supporters, his propensity to speak his mind, even when he does not agree with Muluzi, has caused rifts. Like Mutharika's selection as the UDF presidential nominee in 2004, most in the UDF saw the selection of Chilumpha as VP to be an imposition by Muluzi so that he could maintain control behind the scenes. Chilumpha refused to follow Mutharika when he created the DPP however, leading first to an attempt to remove Chilumpha from office and later the arrest for treason.

¶7. (C) Comment: Regardless of the source of financial support or motivation, Chilumpha offers the UDF a legitimate challenger to Muluzi. Chilumpha's ability to appeal to both Muslims and intellectuals in the UDF is undeniable, but it is still likely not enough to overcome Muluzi's support from the common man, especially if Muluzi continues his populist antics such as his appearance at a supermarket in Blantyre last week apparently offering to pay for the purchases of the customers in the store. In the unlikely event that Chilumpha does win the nomination, any deal previously made with the DPP will likely be forgotten as Chilumpha will have served his purpose by derailing Muluzi's presidential bid. Even without victory, Chilumpha contesting the nomination is further evidence of a slow-motion fracturing of the UDF, allowing the DPP an opportunity to gain a foothold in previously UDF-dominated areas of the southern region of Malawi. Chilumpha's challenge, if truly DPP-supported, may come back to haunt Mutharika, as a Muluzi victory over Chilumpha through a democratic process at the convention will allow Muluzi to claim he was the only one of the major-party candidates democratically chosen to represent his party, possibly reinvigorating his presidential bid and the UDF as a party. This talking point may be short-lived, however, since Mutharika announced in public last week that he encouraged others from the DPP to challenge him during party deliberations. END COMMENT.
EASTHAM